

NGA History



The US geospatial intelligence effort began in 1803 when President Thomas Jefferson sent the Army's Lewis and Clark expedition to explore and map the recently acquired Louisiana Territory. As the Army, assisted by its contract civilian scientists, supported the country's westward expansion, the Navy similarly began reaching out across the oceans. This maritime expansion, coupled with the Navy's desire not to have to rely on British or commercial charts, led to the establishment of the Navy Depot of Charts and Instruments in 1830.

US mapping and charting efforts remained relatively unchanged until World War I, when aerial photography became a major contributor to battlefield intelligence. Using stereo viewers, photo interpreters reviewed thousands of images. Many of these were of the same target at different angles and times, giving rise to what became modern imagery analysis and mapmaking. After the war, as airplane capacity and range improved, the need for charts grew. The Army Air Corps established its Map Unit, which was renamed the Aeronautical Chart Plant in 1943 and began work in St. Louis, MO.

With America's entry into World War II, map service requirements greatly expanded. Women entered the mapping workforce in substantial numbers to meet the growing need for skilled workers, and technological improvements in aircraft, cameras and film dramatically increased the military applications of aerial photography. It was during this era when the concept of combining maps with analyzed imagery truly matured.



After World War II, needs for economy, military efficiency, and information about the Soviet Union led to several reorganizations and research developments. The National Security Act of 1947 created the Department of Defense, established the US Air Force as a separate service, and to better centralize the nation's intelligence efforts, established the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

On 21 June 1956, President Eisenhower ordered the commencement of secret, high-flying U-2 aircraft reconnaissance flights over the Soviet Union to observe and detect Moscow's actions and potential capabilities. At the same time, the US embarked on a program to develop satellites capable of photographing the earth and returning the images into American hands. The result was the Corona satellite program, which delivered its first film of the USSR on August 19, 1960. To support analysis of the data from these systems, in January 1961 President Eisenhower authorized the creation of the National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC), combining CIA, Army, Navy, and Air Force assets to solve national intelligence problems.

It was the newly formed NPIC that first identified the USSR's basing of missiles in Cuba, thus establishing the proud tradition of imagery analysis. By exploiting images from the U-2, film from canisters ejected by orbiting satellites, and the SR-71, the NPIC analysts developed the information necessary to inform US policy makers and influence operations.

After Vietnam, the need for economy, maximum use of new technologies, and reduced human resources led to the armed services combining most of their mapping and charting capabilities into one organization, resulting in the formation of the Defense Mapping Agency in 1972. This new capability proved invaluable in support of military operations; during Operation Desert Storm, DMA produced over 66 million individual maps in support of military operations.



U-2 RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT



1961 CORONA IMAGE OF CUBA

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By the mid-1990's, imagery was the basis for both imagery intelligence and map-based imagery products, the Intelligence Community considered centralizing management of both functions. In 1996, the US Congress, the CIA, and the Department of Defense agreed to combine the efforts of the country's mapping and imagery analysis efforts, creating the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA).

Formed from several defense and intelligence agencies, NIMA merges imagery, maps, charts, and environmental data to produce what has been coined "*geospatial intelligence*". Using state-of-the-art software and hardware, NIMA can create animated renditions of imagery and geospatial data, allowing users to visualize inaccessible terrain. This capability can aid in multiple applications, such as resolving international disputes; for example, between 1995 and 1998, NIMA products helped resolve longstanding border differences between Peru and Ecuador as well as between Israel and South Lebanon. NIMA products also supported the Dayton Peace Accord efforts in the Balkans. In February 2000, the Space Shuttle Endeavour's Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM) provided the most detailed measurements of the planet's elevation ever gathered--data that will prove invaluable in supporting NGA's geospatial intelligence efforts.

NIMA has contributed to homeland defense efforts, helped resolve international disputes, aided disaster relief efforts, helped the armed forces overseas, developed safer airways charts, and remapped the world. In the mid-1990's NIMA produced the Global Positioning System "Safety of Navigation" effort that vastly improved information on airports. NIMA supported peace maintenance operations in the Balkans by providing visual representations and analyses of terrain for international forces monitoring activities in the region. NIMA continues to support maritime operations by providing the "Notice to Mariners," a unique capability that provides those at sea the most accurate nautical charts available.

NIMA also plays a critical role in homeland security. After September 11th, NIMA partnered with the U. S. Geological Survey to survey the WTC site and determine the extent of the destruction. In 2002, NIMA partnered with Federal organizations to provide geospatial assistance to the 2002 Winter Olympics in Utah.

NGA's geospatial intelligence products serve a variety of military, civil, and international needs. NGA is proud of its mission to provide *timely, relevant, and accurate* geospatial intelligence in support of national security and will continue efforts to achieve our vision to *Know the Earth, Show the Way*.

On Nov. 24, 2003 the President signed the 2004 Defense Authorization Bill, a provision of which authorized NIMA to change its name to the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA). Our new name is the latest step in a transformation process underway since our inception on Oct. 1, 1996.

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